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Defining ‘sincerity’ in a memorable and authentic cultural consumption experience

Martin Gannon, Sean Lochrie and Babak Taheri*

*Correspondent author: b.taheri@hw.ac.uk

School of Management and Languages, Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh

Introduction and Literature Review

Situated in the northwest corner of Iran in the East-Azerbaijan province, Kandovan is a troglodyte village thought to be over 850 years old (Yahyavi & Shaghaghi, 2012) (**Figure 1**). Despite the village’s secluded nature, its distinctiveness has made it a popular tourist site attracting over 600,000 visitors annually (Ashrafi, 2013). With this in mind, and within troglodyte heritage context, we aim to develop, for the first time, a ‘sincerity’ scale within the consumer-based model of authenticity (CBA) presented by Kolar and Zabkar (2010) and Bryce et al. (2015). This model explores the relationships surrounding cultural motivation, heritage-based behavior, perceptions of authenticity, and behavioral consequences. However, our study further develops this by adding a sincerity variable and replacing loyalty with memorable tourism experience, before amending the relationships between various variables in the CBA model (**Figure 2**).



Figure1. View of Kandovan Village.

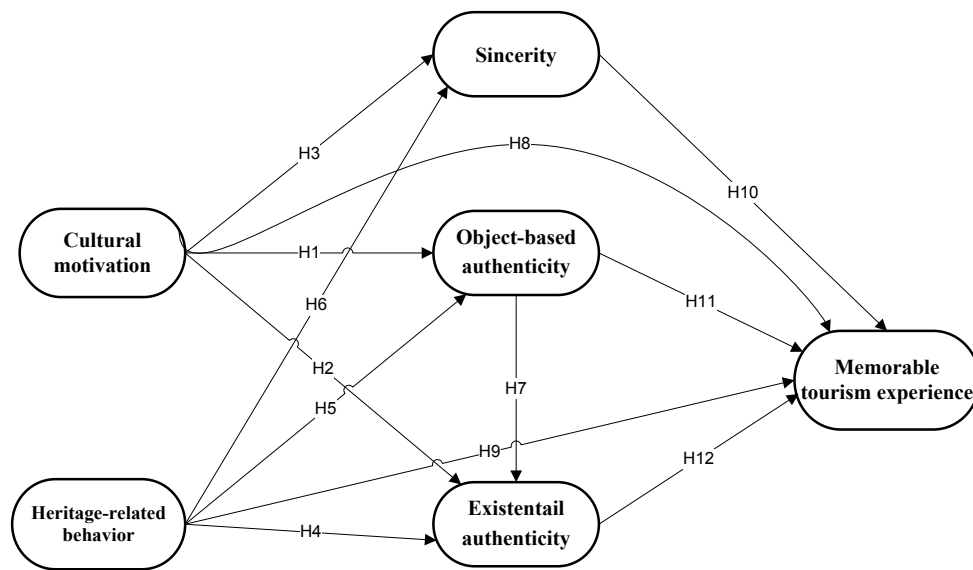


Figure 2. Proposed model.

Taylor (2001) suggests that destination sincerity is similar to destination authenticity in that both are considered ‘real’ representations of place, culture, and values, but extends this by stating that ‘sincere’ hospitality occurs independently of visitor presence instead of primarily for the benefit of visitors. The subtlety in Taylor’s (2001) definition emerges from the assertion that an event, experience, or site has to actually *be* real independently of tourist attendance rather than *appearing* to be real – staged or otherwise – in order to attract and satisfy the expectations of tourists (Zerva, 2015). Therefore, for the purpose of this study sincerity is conceptualized as when locals give an accurate representation of themselves and their lives to tourists, while actively interacting with them throughout their regular day-to-day practices.

Authenticity has been the focus of much academic research (Brown, Sherry, & Kozinets, 2003; Zhou, Zhang, Zhang, & Ma, 2015) and can be described as the term used to capture what is perceived to be true, real and/or actual (Peterson, 2005). One stream of research within this debate concerns itself with the uncertainty surrounding what is perceived to be authentic and what this pertains to (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010). This discourse often draws attention to the distinction between object-based and existential authenticity (Bryce et al., 2015). Object-based authenticity centers on the genuineness of relics, artefacts and rituals and is based upon “how people see themselves in relation to objects” (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006, p. 74). Existential authenticity is not regarded as object-based, rather it is described as a “state of being” (Rickly-Boyd, 2012, p. 682). Bryce et al. (2015) found the perception of authenticity has a positive impact on loyalty.

Cultural motivations are significant within travel and tourism. Research suggests that those motivated by the cultural aspects of a destination are more likely to derive a greater degree of satisfaction than those who are not (Bryce et al., 2015; Richards, 2002). Bryce et al. (2015) note that cultural motivation has a positive influence on the perception of authenticity and loyalty. Additionally, while explicit actions such as heritage-related tourism are often assessed in research, involvement in wider activities is more challenging to measure (Bryce et al., 2015; McDonald, 2011). For example, research exploring public interest and engagement with heritage (McDonald, 2011) categorizes six heritage-related behaviors. These behaviors are seen to be intangible, frequently personal, and are inclined to be overlooked in relational terms. Bryce et al. (2015) highlight that heritage-related behavior has a positive influence on object-based authenticity, loyalty and existential authenticity.

One dimension that has always been critical to a destination's success within the tourism sector is its ability to provide a memorable experience to visitors (Lee, 2015). The functional or tangible quality of a destination's offering is no longer the main determining factor tourists consider when deciding whether a destination is worthy of a visit, memorable or interesting (Kim, 2014). If an experience is pleasurable, novel, engaging, involving, authentic, enlightening, or rejuvenating then there is a higher likelihood that travelers will consider it as being 'unforgettable' (Kim, 2014).

Scale Development and Key Findings

Following Diamantopoulos and Winklhofer's (2001) and Rossiter's (2002) suggestion, we used several steps in formulating a scale development procedure (domain definition, item generation, scale purification, scale validation and scale application). As neither a measurement scale nor a particular conceptual model for sincerity has been found in extant literature, we conducted 33 exploratory interviews in order to develop sincerity scale items. While conducting thematic analysis on the respondents, 18 themes/items were acknowledged. For refinement of the scale, Delphi technique using experts' judgment was employed to review these 18 items and confirm content validity. After several alteration Delphi stages all experts agreed that the final items accurately defined the domains of sincerity; i.e., indicator specification. Consequently, 10 items were deemed representative of the scale. Following Diamantopoulos' (2005) suggestions, a sample of 203 British university students across different subjects was employed to test scale purification. The results shows all 10 items load under one factor with Eigen values of higher than 1 which explains 91.913% of the variance in sample size of 203.

For scale validation, data was collected in Kandovan village from international tourists. Data cleaning condensed the sample to 518 final questionnaires. Partial least squares (PLS) was used to analyze data at this stage. Composite reliability (CR), Cronbach's Alpha (α), factor loadings and average variance extracted (AVE) were used to test convergent validity. The results supported the convergent validity of the measurement model. The Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion was used to test discriminant validity. For the formative index, the VIF values were under the cut-off value of 5. The majority of items in the formative construct held weight higher than .1 and all items were significant. As per Taheri, Jafari, and O'Gorman (2014), the external validity was tested to see whether each indicator can be significantly correlated with a 'global item' that summarizes the togetherness of sincerity formative measure. Hence, an additional item was developed: 'In my opinion, sincerity is experiencing the real lives of the local population through interaction'. All indicators significantly correlated with this item. Thus, all indicators were included in this study. The overall GoF is .538, which indicates very good model fit. The model explains 48 percent of memorable tourist experience, 62 per cent of object-based authenticity, 70 per cent of existential authenticity and 20 per cent of sincerity. As seen in **Table 1**, the results of the analysis provide empirical support for the majority of hypotheses. H4, H9 and H11 were rejected. For nomological validity, all hypothesized relationships between sincerity scale and the other constructs in the model were significant in the projected directions (see also Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2014; Henseler, Ringle, & Sinkovics, 2009). After following the systematic index development approach, sincerity can be seen as a valid formative measurement construct.

Table 1. Estimates of direct paths.

| Paths | Path coefficient | t-values |
|-------|------------------|----------|
|-------|------------------|----------|

| | | |
|--|-------|--------|
| Cultural Motivation → Object-based Authenticity (H1) | .638 | 17.365 |
| Cultural Motivation → Existential Authenticity (H2) | .395 | 9.087 |
| Cultural Motivation → Sincerity (H3) | .421 | 7.849 |
| Heritage-related Behavior → Existential Authenticity (H4) | .027 | .724 |
| Heritage-related Behavior → Object-based Authenticity (H5) | .193 | 4.741 |
| Heritage-related Behavior → Sincerity (H6) | .125 | 3.392 |
| Object-based Authenticity → Existential Authenticity (H7) | .470 | 11.817 |
| Cultural Motivation → Memorable Tourist Experience (H8) | .133 | 2.198 |
| Heritage-related Behavior → Memorable Tourist Experience (H9) | -.024 | .505 |
| Sincerity → Memorable Tourist Experience (H10) | .417 | 9.639 |
| Object-based Authenticity → Memorable Tourist Experience (H11) | -.047 | .761 |
| Existential Authenticity → Memorable Tourist Experience (H12) | .308 | 4.589 |

Notes: *t*-values for the item loadings to two-tailed test: $t > 1.96$ at $p < .05$, $t > 2.57$ at $p < .01$, $t > 3.29$ at $p < .001$.

Conclusion

This research responded to the need of a scale to measure concept of ‘sincerity’ in cultural heritage consumption. As an important measure, this scale can complement the existing research in better understanding CBA (e.g., Bryce et al., 2015; Kolar & Zabkar, 2010). Cultural heritage attractions should endeavor to regularly assess their success in relation to memorable tourism experience. Cultural consumers’ interest in a given consumption place lies in their authentic and sincere experience with content and context. Thus, cultural heritage managers (with the help of locals) can use our newly developed sincerity scale as a tool to optimize their performance and evaluate whether their offerings are authentic and sincere. Moreover, as the extended CBA model establishes a link between different important variables, local authority and heritage marketers could use it as a diagnostic tool to identify the predictive power of cultural motivation and heritage-related behavior on the perception of authenticity, sincerity and memorable outcomes.

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